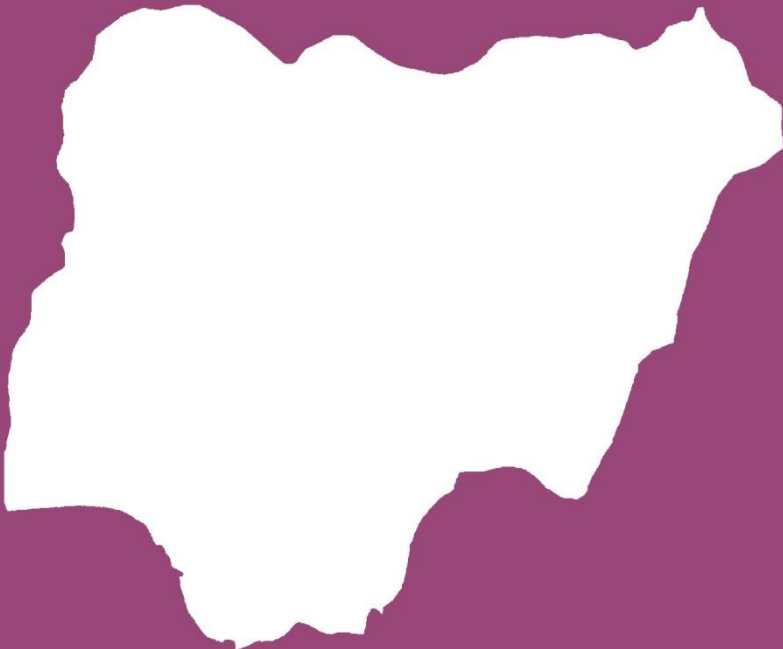


CHAPTER FIVE (5)

GSP

**GENERAL STUDIES PROGRAMME
NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT & ECONOMIC**



THE MILITARY IN NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT

The Genesis of Military Intervention in Politics
Military Administration, Nature, Structure and Procedure
Military Bureaucracy Society

GSP2203

NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMY

CHAPTER 5:

THE MILITARY IN NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT

5.1 THE GENESIS OF MILITARY INTERVENTION IN POLITICS

For a comprehensive understanding of the issue of Military in Politics, it is important to know the historical origin of the military and its traditional role in the Nigerian state.

Historically, today's Nigerian Military is an offshoot of the so-called colonial army. The British Colonial power established what was called the **West African Frontier Force**, which later became the **Royal West African Frontier Force**. In Nigeria, the **Lagos Constabulary**, the **Oil River Constabulary** and the **Royal Niger Constabulary** were amalgamated to form the so-called colonial army whose primary responsibility was not the protection of any territory for the safety of the native inhabitants, but rather for the protection and defense of imperialist interest. It is therefore, essentially a mercantilist army. **The Royal Niger Company** in an effort to protect its exploitative tendencies and economic interests established an armed force. At independence, it was the so-called colonial army (the **West-African Frontier Forces**) that metamorphosed into the present day **Nigerian Armed Forces**. The **Nigerian Military** consists of the *Army*, the *Navy* and the *Air Force*.

The unfortunate situation is that, the Nigeria Military still retain the colonial mentality in the neocolonial state. Patriotism and

nationalism have not found their ways into the mental make-up of the Nigerian armed forces. Unlike the armies of the developed countries like United States of America, where the Military was actually involved in the anti-colonial war which led to the independence of the United States, in Nigeria, the army was not involved in any war in the struggle for independence. It was, indeed, protecting the colonial interests. The United States' military should be, while in Nigeria the military feels otherwise.

Traditionally, the military wherever it is found is supposed to defend the state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Its traditionally role is that of defense and is controlled by the civilian regime. The military is supposed to be politically neutral. In Nigeria today the military do not only involves itself in politics, it also has dominated the political scene and has established a bureaucracy that is very powerful. It has affected the psychic and the thinking of the civil society to the extent that whatever is said to be military is seen as superiors and cannot be questioned.

There are other reasons for military intervention in Nigerian politics. The most common reason the military gives whenever it intervenes, especially by coup, is that the politician could not maintain law and order, and are unable to resolve their political differences. The **first coup in Nigeria, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzewu** - the so-called **Majors' Strike** - laid much emphasis on the failure of the civilians to solve their political regime of corruption and indiscipline. The coming of **Buhari and Idiagbon** into power on **December 31st 1983** was based on the following reasons among others:

- That the economy had been hopelessly mismanages, to the extent that Nigerian had become a debtor and beggar nation.
- That corruption and indiscipline had become the order of the day without regard to public disappointment.
- That unemployment had reached an embarrassing proportion including the graduates.
- That the hospital had been reduced to mere consulting clinics without drugs, water and equipment.

It is interesting to note that the Buhari regime as well as the subsequent military administrations did not do anything better. Rather, the situation worsened. For example, as at the time the Buhari regime came in, **a tablet of toilet soap (Lux) was sold at 25 kobo**, but before the untimely end of the **Abacha regime**, **the same tablet soap (Lux) was sold at the cost of N25**. This increase in price has affected every commodity and services, due to the devaluation of the currency under a military regime. In short, the military has not done anything better at the level of economic development.

Finer (1962: 20) argued that military intervention is basically about the attempt by military officers to get involved in the political process in order to improve upon what they perceived to be the problems associated with politics. Finer maintained that the Third World countries, being of low political culture, are particularly susceptible to military interventions.

Another reason for military intervention is role-confusion. At independence, the military was not restricted to its professional responsibility. It (military) had been involved in settling civil disorder. In the **Western Regional crises** and the **Tiv riots** the

military was used to settle these crises. It then became clear for the military that it could be a better manager of the state than the politicians.

Of course, a dominant reason for military intervention in politics is the corporate interest of the military. To First (1972) **“whenever the political background to a coup d’état, when the army acts, it generally acts for army reasons. First’s position has been supported by other writers. It is agreed that even if army take-over is predominant; or merely coincidental with civil unrest, corporate and personal motives are invariably present in coup situation and cannot be ignored.”** To Lukham (1917), the military as the custodian of the national fulfills a guardian role. That is to say, the military is the last and only institution the nation can lean back on, in the event of the crisis that threatens national unity and cohesion. This was the reason given for the military intervention that ushered in the **General Abacha junta**. The submission was that the **June 12, 1993**. Political Saga was threatening national unity as such the military was the only institution that could keep the nation united.

5.2 MILITARY ADMINISTRATION, NATURE, STRUCTURE AND PROCEDURE

The military is essentially an authoritarian dictatorship. On assuming power, which is usually through the barrel of the gun in a form of a coup d’état, the first thing the military does is the suspension of the constitution and its place decrees are promulgated. The decrees usually relate to the suspension of the constitution, and to elective and politically appointed offices,

including representative institution such as the State and National Assemblies. Other measures are the banning of political parties and political activities, including popular mass gathering.

In place of the suspended elective offices, the office of the Head of State (or Military President in the case of General Babangida) is established and a Supreme Military law-making body (comprising all service chief, the Inspector General of Police, the Defense Minister, etc.) is put in place. This Supreme Military 'legislative' Council has no independent status separate from the Head of State. More often than not, it merely rubber-stamps the wishes of the Head of State.

The Head of State appoints governors of Administrators to all the states of the Federation and can remove any or all at any time with or without due notice. All the state governors are answerable to the Chief of General Staff who is also answerable to the Head of State.

Decisions are taken based on military reasoning (of command and control) and priority, and are executed forcefully without due regard to public opinion. The military also heavily relies on the civil service for the implementation of its programmes. In some instances, the military has to make some reforms of the civil service to pave way for fast execution of some of its politics.

It should be noted at this juncture that there are different types of military regimes. Basically there are three types:

- i. Caretake** - this types of military regime may seek to intervene in order to govern, maintain law and order and

restore constitutional integrity. This, after the home cleaning exercise, it will restore civilian rule through electoral process. The **Murtala/Obasanjo** and **Abdusalami Abubakar's regimes** are seen as caretaker military regimes in Nigeria.

- ii. **Corrective Military Regime** - the military may seek to correct some important deficiencies in the old order. For example during the First Republic, regionalism dominated the political scene. The Gowon administration disbanded the regional system and, in its place, created 12 states to reduce regional sentiments in Nigerian political system. So also the **Buhari/Idiabon regime** came into check corruption, nepotism and mismanagement. The **Major Nzegwu's coup** was this type, even if the implementation misfired.
- iii. **Revolutionary Regime** - Madunagu (1986) sees the military essentially as a political party. He maintains the possibility of revolutionary military administration, which can overcome the undemocratic nature of the army and turn into an armed detachment of the people in the struggle for progress. To him, such an army can be a vanguard party in the absence of an organized vanguard political party.

5.3 MILITARY BUREAUCRACY SOCIETY

The Nigerian civil society generally considered its military. Setup with contempt and prefers the worst civilian regime to the best military regime. The Nigerian military has lost its professionalism to partisan politics even with itself. The Nigerian military is fractionalized, tribalized, sectionalized and riddled with suspicion. It is no longer seen as one united for

national interest more dangerous in the military character today is the growing indiscipline and fractionalization within the armed forces. The civil society is very much aware of the existence of the **Babangida boys, Abacha boys, Yar'adua group**, to mention a few. More worrisome is the lavish style of most serving and retired generals. Some are bigger than their local government in terms of wealth in the words of Attahiru Jega. The civil society knows for certain that the retired generals have become the new bourgeois class with fat bank accounts in foreign countries and in mansions far away from the poor.

In terms of the management of the Nigerian economic, the performance of the military has been a disaster. The military has ruled this country for most of its years of independence. Yet, the military has nothing to show as its achievement, despite the abundant resources available to it, and at its discretion to use. The military has wrecked the Nigerian economy leaving the people of Nigeria in abject poverty.

One other odious side of the military in the Nigerian's politics is the conditioning of the civil society to the military's culture. Today, a military hangover has infiltrated the society. It is very common to find elected officials behaving like military officers giving command and acting against constitutional orders. Generally, the society currently sees the military in negative terms and hopes for a change. The Nigerian society is tired of military rule in all its ramifications. In short, it is now widely believed that a military rule is an aberration to civil society. The civil society seems poised to tolerate any civilian rule, however poor, if only to keep the military at bay.